

Reading Mini-Assessment Grade 5
LA.A.2.2.8 Reference Form C

Making Tracks: Building the First Railroad

During the 1800s, the United States went through a period of great growth. Thirteen colonies slowly expanded and spread across the continent. As the nation grew, people began moving to the western wilderness. Families settled along the westward trails, building small towns in the new frontier. As the west grew, supplies were needed from the eastern cities. At the time, there was no easy way to transport goods to these new regions. The solution to this problem resulted in one of the greatest engineering feats in history: a railroad that ran from the east to the west.

The nation's leaders discussed many routes. Two main plans emerged. The first plan proposed that the railroad follow a trail used by the settlers. The problem was that the trail crossed mountains. The second plan proposed that the railroad extend from New Orleans west. The problem with this plan was the South still had slaves, and many people in the north were against building a railroad through slave states. The country was not only divided east and west by land; it was divided north and south by ideas. It took thirty years before the settlers' trail, called the Emigrant Trail, was chosen as the new passage.

The railroad was built in two parts. One railroad line began work in California and headed east; the other line started work in Omaha and headed west. Building the railroad was a tough job for the workers who were mostly Irish and Chinese immigrants. They tore down hills and filled in valleys so the trains could pass. The workers used dangerous blasting powder to cut through the mountains. Workers dug endlessly with shovels and moved dirt with carts. Yet, their daily pay was only three dollars. Despite the conditions and low pay, men gladly signed on to do the work.

An enormous amount of money was needed for this huge project. Because of high costs, much of the money came from the government. Since the government wanted the project finished quickly, companies were required to complete the railroad within a certain time limit in exchange for these funds.

While workers built the new tracks, improvements were made to the trains. Dining cars were added so passengers could eat between stops. New levers and beams stabilized the train, allowing it to make sharp turns. Since railroad ties were wooden, they decayed. A method was used to pull moisture from the wood. Then, the wood was coated to preserve it. These changes made the long trip across the continent safer and more pleasant for passengers.

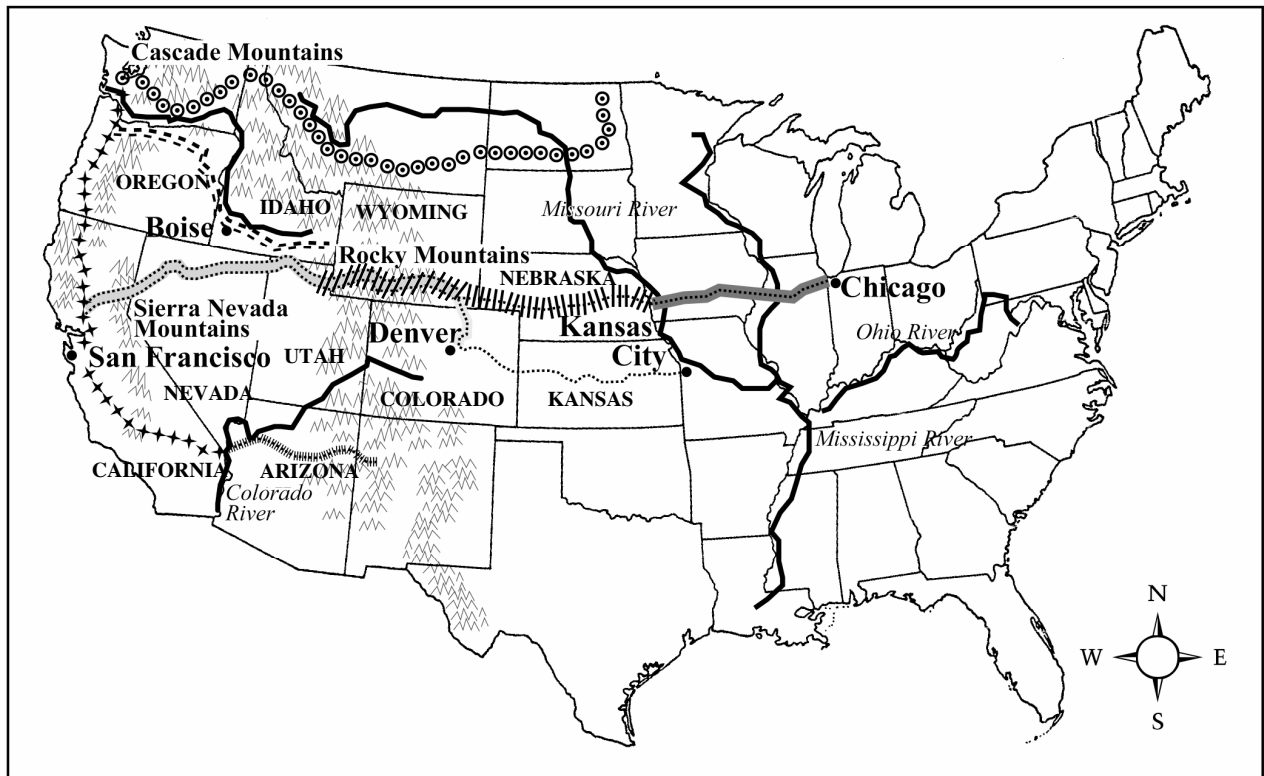
In 1869, the two railroad lines met in Utah. In a special service, the governor of California drove a golden spike into the track linking the two railroads. Now, east and west would be joined. Building a railroad from coast to coast took brains, power, and sweat. No nation as big as the United States had ever tried such a feat before.

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The Central Pacific Line began in Sacramento, California, went east through Nevada and ended in Utah Territory.

The Union Pacific Line began in Omaha, Nebraska, went west through Colorado Territory and Wyoming Territory and ended in Utah Territory.

United States Map



KEY	
.....	Central Pacific Line
-----	Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul Line
.....	Kansas Pacific Line
○○○	Northern Pacific Line
----	Oregon Short Line
+++	Southern Pacific Line
	Union Pacific Line
•	Major City
⋈	Mountains
—	Rivers

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Name _____ **Date** _____

Directions: Read the passage “Making Tracks: Building the First Railroad” then circle the letter of the correct answer.

1. Based on the map, people traveling from Chicago to Denver crossed the
 - A. Ohio River.
 - B. Missouri River.
 - C. Rocky Mountains.
 - D. Cascade Mountains.

2. Based on the passage and the map, the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific met in
 - A. Utah.
 - B. Colorado.
 - C. California.
 - D. Wyoming.

3. Based on the map, what is the northern-most railroad line?
 - A. Oregon Short Line
 - B. Union Pacific Line
 - C. Kansas Pacific Line
 - D. Northern Pacific Line

4. The Central Pacific Line began in
 - A. Omaha.
 - B. Denver.
 - C. Sacramento.
 - D. San Francisco.

5. Based on the passage and the map, building a railroad from east to west was difficult because it
 - A. was built in two parts.
 - B. crossed over major rivers.
 - C. cut through mountain ranges.
 - D. passed through several states.

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Answer Key – Making Tracks

LA.A.2.2.8: The student identifies meanings through the process of selecting and/or organizing information from a single text or across texts. This process may involve application, analysis, synthesis, and/or evaluation appropriate to fifth grade.

1. Based on the map, people traveling from Chicago to Denver crossed the
 - A. Ohio River.
 - B. Missouri River.**
 - C. Rocky Mountains.
 - D. Cascade Mountains.

2. Based on the passage and the map, the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific met in
 - A. Utah.**
 - B. Colorado.
 - C. California.
 - D. Wyoming.

3. Based on the map, what is the most northern railroad line?
 - A. Oregon Short Line
 - B. Union Pacific Line
 - C. Kansas Pacific Line
 - D. Northern Pacific Line**

4. The Central Pacific Line began in
 - A. Omaha.
 - B. Denver.
 - C. Sacramento.**
 - D. San Francisco.

5. Based on the passage and the map, building a railroad from east to west was difficult because it
 - A. was built in two parts.
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